

Using WhatsApp for International Speaking Exam Preparation

Thesis submitted for Magister en la enseñanza del inglés

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Abstract

Computer based testing has become a prevailing tendency in education. However, the increasing importance of preparation related to this type of testing has hardly been addressed in academic research, and even less has been done to investigate using technology to prepare for these technological speaking exams. The WhatsApp application has become popular with the majority of students as a means of communicating to individuals and groups. I hope to show the benefits of using this common, popular messaging application for speaking preparation for an international exam. This case study approach uses three small groups of students from the University Del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia who are preparing for the TOEFL international exam. The sixteen students received thirty hours of classroom teaching which was supported by their WhatsApp group for exam preparation speaking. Simulating the exam conditions we aimed to investigate the benefits and perceptions of the use of WhatsApp for speaking preparation purposes. The study revealed that imitating the exam on WhatsApp proved a valuable and very positive experience for the vast majority of students. Familiarisation of the requirements, exam format and opportunities for self, peer and teacher evaluation were all noted as benefits although some issues of privacy regarding the technology was also raised.

Introduction

It seems to be accepted that we are now living in a globalized world, although there is debate concerning exactly when globalization began (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002) it is undeniable that English Language and its acquisition is an important component at the centre. Even though there are other international languages, the case of English is different in fundamental ways because of the extent of its geographical spread; its cultural diversity of the speakers who use it; and for the infinitely varied sectors in which it is found and the purposes it serves (Dewey, 2007).

Over the last few decades South America has seen solid economic growth in many areas and one of the roles in creating this growth is, in part, closely linked to creating a better-educated, English-speaking workforce (Council, 2015). The commodification of language affects both people's motivations for learning languages and their choices about which languages to learn. It also affects the choices made by institutions (local and national, public and private) as they allocate resources for language education.

One way this language focus in education is being realized in Colombia is through the Colombia Bilingual program. Although initiatives were made in 1982, these were not taken up by many schools and it wasn't until 2004 and the National Bilingualism Act that there were a number of serious reforms designed to promote English language learning. This top-down policy was aimed at providing more access to English resources, business, education and technology, which are all seen as key to growth with increased proficiency having been identified by policymakers as contributing to economic prosperity.

Therefore, in order to aid this development one of the key areas to support in language learning is exams and testing. The principal tools used currently to measure and evaluate the

ability of a person to use and understand English as an academic language are international exams such as APTIS, IELTS and TOEFL.

Importance of the Project

TOEFL history and importance in Colombia

The TOEFL exam has become a widely used standardized test in over one hundred thirty six countries since its founding in the early nineteen sixties. In those early days it consisted of five distinct sections that evaluated reading comprehension, vocabulary, listening comprehension, English structure, and grammar, entirely with multiple-choice questions and it was managed by ETS, Educational Testing Service and the College Board. ETS also administered the SAT exams and is a non-profit organization that was founded in 1947.

One major problem to the original version of the TOEFL was that it did not evaluate speaking or writing skills. Although separate tests were developed for these purposes during the 1970s and 1980s and most students took a streamlined version of the original TOEFL. The Test of Spoken English (TSE) and Test of Written English (TWE) were added to the TOEFL in 1980 and 1986 respectively, creating what ETS referred to as a "suite" of assessments. This suite featured both multiple-choice questions and graded responses, and this basic framework remained in place into the 21st century.

The first major development occurred in 1998 when they introduced the computer-based version of TOEFL (CBT) The second major change was the iBT which was introduced in the USA, Canada, France, Germany and Italy in late 2005, followed by a gradual roll-out across the world, Alderson, (2009).

The exam is meant to have a clearer focus and be a reliable means of measuring the proficiency of non-native speakers of English, in particular for academic purposes, Alderson (2009). However, as well as international educational institutions, several domestic higher-learning institutions as well as non-educational agencies have also made use of the score of individuals taking TOEFL as a requirement of not only admission, recruitment, but also exit purposes, Sulistyo (2009).

In Colombia in particular it is often used in tertiary educational settings as an exit ticket for graduation, thus making it all the more important for a wide range of students, regardless of their degree subject. The British Council (2015) study confirmed that the majority of learners in 2014 were in University or studied it to improve employment prospects and the third biggest reason found for learning English as it is mandatory in secondary school. Interestingly, they found less than 10% of people studied English for work, social or travel related reasons.

Striker (2010) found that from a sample of 765 Colombian takers of the TOEFL their average was 80.12. This appeared to have changed little in three years as in December 2013, the overall average score for all Colombian TOEFL examinees that year was 81, meaning that Colombian students are classified as ‘intermediate’ for reading and listening and ‘fair’ for speaking and writing, Council, B. (2015).

Role of Technology

Is part of the solution for the speaking section a more dynamic, up to date mobile learning andragogy?

While we seem to be developing a very close relationship with devices such as computers, mobile phones, and tablets, it seems that smartphones have become the center of

the technological world around us (Carrera, 2018). This prevalence of social media and apps is fuelling a new kind of genre, first SMS created text talk and then this developed into mobile instant messaging (MIM), apps and social media which utilised text talk and emojis were added into the messaging language. MIM has developed to a truly multi modal new kind of hybrid; spoken, written, pictorial and electronic chat (Andujar, 2016). One of the overriding questions is now how can we now utilize these new forms of communication into a mobile pedagogy, which is based on the belief that teachers and learners are active participants in making and shaping language learning, Kukulska-Hulme Et al (2015).

It is now becoming common that language learners will often open a WhatsApp group for the class in the first session. These messaging groups offer a new channel to reach the class. It provides the teacher with an amazing array of different tools at their disposal. Naturally, information availability and flow can work also work in the other direction; students now have a whole variety of educational resources at their fingertips. Before, the teacher had all the 'knowledge', this has changed as the internet has brought about the great idea of shared knowledge and learning, a community of practice with the idea of distributed knowledge, Brown (2000).

However, it has often been observed that these class groups often operate in their native language and can actually be a distraction in class and to teaching. People are frequently distracted by their mobile phones and this affects concentration and attention span therefore the focus on the task in class can be lost.

Many studies have researched and investigated the use of mobile technology and messaging (MALL - Mobile Assisted Language Learning) over the last two decades, although most have looked at use in secondary and tertiary education. Burston, (2013), has an expansive annotated bibliography of MALL from 1994-2012 which shows some previous

studies have focused on content rather than solely ESL purposes, Khatoon et Al. (2015) on dentistry, which found that students easily adopted the technology however, lecturers were more hesitant, referring to the need for more structure and official procedure in place. Ng et al. (2016) worked with accounting students in Hong Kong. Willemse (2015) worked in Health care education and found it could enhance the integration of theory and clinical practice. Robinson et al (2015) in radiography found it developed social presence in first year students and offered benefits over those of embedded social media platforms, such as discussion boards. Liu and Shi (2016) in computer education investigated the use of Moodle and WeChat.

With regards to the exam sector there has been very limited studies, Zhang (2015) conducted a study with some 60 business students which gave some interesting information on their preferences of activities in WhatsApp and creating social constructionism. The activities are designed to increase collaborative tasks involving the whole community, they have four task types; discussions, jigsaw activities, brainstorming and case based activity. Their results showed approximately half of the students (53%) rank the jigsaw reading activities in the first place in terms of learning outcomes as they enjoyed 'being the teacher' (Zhang 2015).

Saritepeci, (2019) study from Turkey investigated the use of WhatsApp to support preparation for the national academic language exams (YDS). These exams are similar in way ways to the TOEFL and so this study has added relevance. YDS are usually taken by adults and university students looking to certify their academic English level for occupation or educational requirements. It is in electronic form as well as paper based consists of 80 multiple-choice questions separated into sections and completed in 180 minutes. The case study of 29 students found that the participants enjoyed the increased active learning, learner-

instructor interaction and it improved learner satisfaction and motivation. However, in their design, they restricted input and so only the teacher could contribute materials, videos, activities, questions, etc. This restriction was to prevent ambiguities of the roles in the group and possible inconvenient usages. One of the benefits of this rule was that answers were sent privately to the teacher and so the other participants could not see the answers before they answered themselves.

However, overall, there has been very little study in the use of MALL with ESL students in exam preparation. As Bozdogan states (2015), there is a need for a review of Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) in order to shed light on the future research to prepare, plan, design and integrate a mobile learning based pedagogical framework. Another issue with past studies is the short-term nature of them, with Miller (2016) from Hong Kong being the exception by far. This 9 month study stands out as the longest of over 39 reviewed however, the sample size was restrictively small at 4 (Tang, 2017). The vast majority of other studies were between 4 weeks to a semester (Burston, 2015) in duration and have had very little or no follow up work. This longitudinal study hopes to rectify this by providing more meaningful data from over a longer period of time.

Despite the limited studies in this area with ever-improving technology, the majority of even the most recent studies of MALL applications have remained restricted to structuralist vocabulary and grammar tutorial drill activities (Burston, 2014). However, I believe that WhatsApp could help bridge the gap between the class environment and exam simulation; it could be a useful tool for both the educator and the students for developing both their speaking and listening skills. It can introduce new reflection opportunities, vocabulary and ideas as well as being a social tool to make the group feel more unified, supported and connected to the language and topics. By maintaining a class, teacher led, WhatsApp group

can the students significantly improve their exam speaking skills? I aim to show that careful management of a WhatsApp group can support students and improve student's abilities, skills and motivation to prepare for the exam.

So, with the trends towards communities of learning, increasing student autonomy and improving integration of technology in education my study aims to investigate the use of WhatsApp in exam preparation for the speaking section.

Research questions

(1) How do WhatsApp activities help support TOEFL course students prepare for the speaking section?

Sub-questions

(2) What type of materials and activities are used through WhatsApp to practice the speaking section for an international exam?

(3) What are the student perceptions towards working using WhatsApp?

(4) How does WhatsApp contribute to the TOEFL course learning community?

General Objective

- Analyse WhatsApp activities that help support TOEFL course students prepare for the speaking section.

Specific Objectives

- Describe the kinds activities students undertake when using WhatsApp

- Explore student's perception of the use of WhatsApp for exam preparation
- Describe how the TOEFL course contributes to a learning community

Unlike the vast majority of studies in this area, which are generally focused on secondary and higher education students, this study will be using various exam preparation groups. Thus, the students are usually adults aged from early twenties to late fifties. There is a vast range in their social backgrounds and knowledge. Group sizes varying from 5 to 8 students but all are adults and are taking evening preparation classes in a large private North Colombian university. Students within the three groups have various social and economic backgrounds but all have a mobile smartphone with Internet connection. Their ages range from 15 to 45, the youngest being school leavers, the adults were professionals, for example teachers and engineers. All the groups had approximately a 60% female to 40 male ratio.

Students undertaking the exam preparation only have limited access to support materials based in the computer lab where it is best to simulate the exam conditions. For this reason WhatsApp and MALL methodology could be well suited to supplement the materials in class as it places virtually no limits on the amount of time we can use the app. Without the time and space barrier the topics covered could be extended and second language production opportunities for the students greatly increased. Thus, mobile learning has extended opportunities for making teaching and learning available beyond the traditional classroom, (Beatty, 2013).

So, we have seen the importance and influence of English is growing worldwide and within Colombia however, inside exam preparation there has been little change in the way we prepare students and the authenticity of preparation is still lacking. As the need for English grows, so does the electronic revolution that is changing the classroom and language learning whether we like it or not. On line exams or computer based exams are now becoming

commonplace and teacher methodology is playing catch up, as our digital native students are quick to acknowledge and embrace new learning methods.

Consequently, we, as educators need to step up and find ways to integrate and blend in these new ways and options of learning with MALL. We must be able to fill the gaps of language learning and take it from the classroom into any place we want whether it be the home, workplace or social life.

Speaking practice for exams has traditionally been with a partner or teacher, taking turns and interacting face to face. However, by making exam preparation more directly relevant in the classroom to today's modern computer based exams could be possible with well-structured input on a social media format such as WhatsApp. In international computer based exams, students do not speak to another visible person face to face in a relaxed format, with no time limits, so why should we practice in this unrealistic format? Using the technology easily available to use, our mobiles and WhatsApp can simulate the speaking exam conditions and therefore provide a more realistic and productive environment to practice speaking. Furthermore, the technological attributes of WhatsApp enables a record of input and output, in contrast to simple pair work, and thus the users have the additional benefit of archiving their and others work which can subsequently be reviewed and evaluated.

The following section will be looking at some of the key concepts, the development from CALL to mobile learning, the growing autonomous movement, exam preparation for speaking and washback, multimodality involved in MALL and a review of some of the major papers and contributors to this field.

Theoretical Framework

Socio Cultural Perspective

If we consider learning as a situated, social endeavour, facilitated and developed through social interactions and conversations between people (Vygotsky 1978), MALL use can enhance the learning environment from the socio-cultural perspective. Such a holistic approach to linguistics implies that language should be studied in its natural surroundings where personal, situational, cultural and societal factors shape the production and evolution of language, Ma (2017). Over the last few decades the emergence of mobile technology and their tools into the learning environment is hard to overlook. As learning is affected and modified by the tools used for learning, then reciprocally, the learning tools are modified by the ways that they are used for learning Kearney (2012).

Koole's (2009) FRAME model (figure 1) sits well with socio-cultural views of learning, taking into consideration both technical characteristics of mobile devices as well as social and personal learning processes. It aims to grasp the learning that emerges from the convergence of mobile technologies, learning capacities and social interaction. Koole (2009) proposed the FRAME model, a Framework for the Rational Analysis of Mobile Education. It conceives collaborative construction of knowledge in mobile contexts as dependent on the intersection of interactions (between individuals, dyads, groups), and mediation of conversational technology (see figure 1 below).

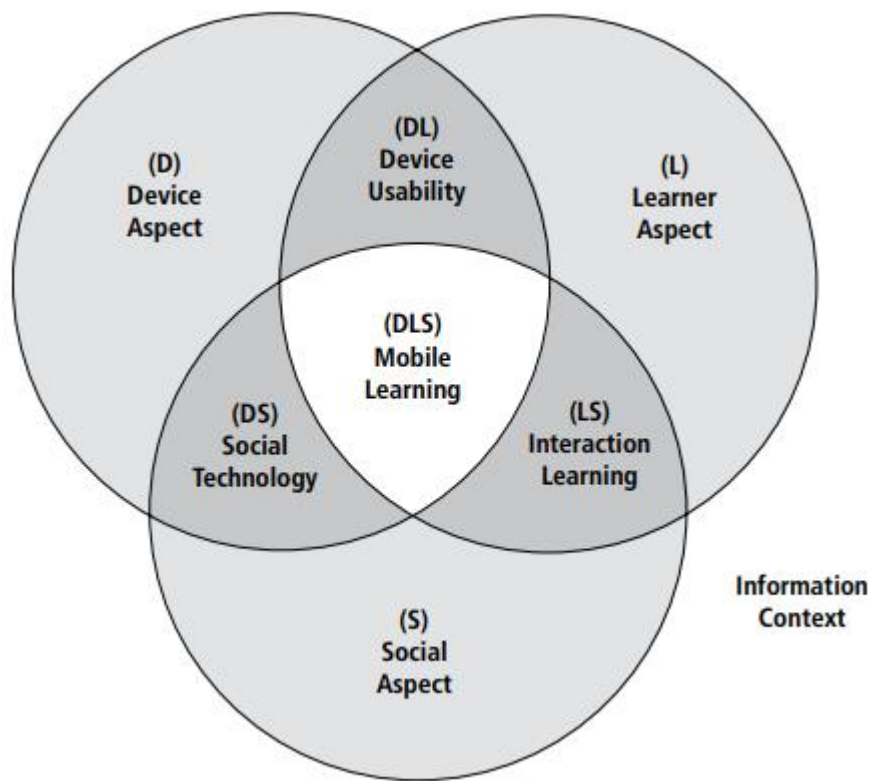


Figure 1. FRAME model Koole 2009

The **device aspect** (D) refers to the physical, technical and functional characteristics of mobile devices (e.g. mobile phones), which invariably affect the interface between the mobile *learner* and the *learning task(s)*. The **learner aspect** (L) underscores the cognitive abilities, memory, prior knowledge, emotions and possible motivations of the individual learner. It emphasises understanding how learners use prior knowledge to encode, store and transfer information. The **social aspect** (S) constitutes the seedbed of interaction and cooperation. Lecturers and learners must adhere to the rules of engagement and cooperation, which enable information exchange, knowledge construction and sustenance of cultural practices, Koole (2009).

Collectively and individually, learners consume and create information and it is within this and the existing context of information that the FRAME model sits. The

interaction with information is mediated through technology and it is through these complex interactions that information becomes meaningful and useful.

This theory is similar to the Active theory from Kaptelinin, (2006) although it differs in that the FRAME model emphasises the role of technology beyond simply an artefact of “cultural-historic” development. In the FRAME model, the mobile device is an active component in equal footing to learning and social processes.

Learning Communities and Activity Theory

Activity theory is a framework that researchers use to design and analyze interactions between members of a group and discover factors influencing their participation in online discussion. Activity theory helped the researcher find factors that influence students’ participation in online discussion (Barhoumi, 2015).

Activity theory is based on six related principals:

1. The first principal is the orientedness of the object. The objective of the activity system has social and cultural properties in the system, such as collaborative or cooperative learning in an online course.
2. Subjects are actors engaged in activities. This is considered the individual level of activity theory; students are contextual subjects engaged in collaborative learning.
3. Community or externalization is considered a social context of the system and a community level of activity theory; all actors are involved in the activity system (e.g., a group of students engaged in learning based on social interaction for constructing and sharing of knowledge is an example of a learning community).

4. Tools are considered a technological level of activity theory. In the system, communication between communities is mediated by tools that transmit social knowledge. It includes the artefacts used by actors in the system. Tools influence actor-structure interactions and are influenced by culture.
5. The division of labor is a considered a hierarchical structure of activity or the division of activities among actors in the system.
6. Rules are the conventions and guidelines regulating activities in the system, such as rules of discussion between students in collaborative learning.

There are three levels of activity theory: The technological level, the individual level, and the community level. Hewitt (2004) used activity theory to evaluate learning communities in online learning environments and to explore the factors that influence students' participation in online communities. The ease of use of the technology exploited in online learning and its usefulness are both pertinent factors that influence students' positive attitudes toward the adoption of online learning communities to construct and share knowledge.

Ma and Cheng (2015) found that by engaging in learning communities and becoming motivated and inspired by peers and teachers were seen as important and useful during the test preparation process. These learning communities are a means of extending in-class instruction, which has time constraints, and students appreciated information sharing and interactions with peers and teachers when participating in such learning communities.

Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL)

CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) was first coined in 1983 at a TESOL convention and encompasses an approach, using computers to aid, assist, present, reinforce and assess language learning and teaching (Chaka, 2009). Sánchez-Tornel (2011) defines CALL as any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language. This is a very broad definition and materials for CALL may include those which are purpose-made for language learning and those which adapt existing computer-based materials, video and other materials. Also due to the changing nature of technology, materials are always being developed and adapted providing a very complex bank of ever-changing resources. However, as Sanchez-Tornel (2011) notes just because there are volumes of materials and exercises online it does not mean that all are useful and transferable into the real world.

So despite over 30 years of existence CALL has yet to make a significant impact on ESL teaching despite a widespread abundance of CALL activities, the purposeful and effective integration of CALL into study programs remains at the very beginning stages, O'Bryan (2007). Part of the reason CALL has not become more established could be due, in part, to the fast moving development and nature that is technology. It changes so rapidly that CALL knowledge and skills must be constantly renewed to stay apace of the field, Hubbard (2016).

There is also some debate as to the definition and boundaries of CALL and MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) and how much they overlap. Beatty (2003, p7) stated that CALL is “any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language”. However, Hubbard (2016) would suggest that it is not just computers and

laptops but also includes the networks connecting them, peripheral devices associated with them, and a number of other technological innovations such as PDAs (personal digital assistants), mp3 players, mobile phones, electronic whiteboards, and even DVD players.

Maybe if we consider CALL and MALL to be subsets of eLearning, I would suggest that the future of integrating technology into the classroom lies more with MALL. Just the fact that MALL usually uses students' personal devices rather than institutionally maintained networks and equipment means enormous savings in technological investment and maintenance. Chaka (2009) notes that MALL has a competitive and utilitarian advantage as MALL's main factors include: mobility, ubiquity, and connectivity; portability and handheld ability; convergence, multifunctionality, cross-platform blending, optionality, and convenience; access, accessibility, availability, and affordability; and context-aware-ness, personalization, and flexibility.

The first published usage of using MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning) was actually from an L1 study in a Canadian secondary school using PDA devices (Callan, 1994). In L2 the first study was probably from Japan and an investigation into the use of bilingual electronic dictionaries in 1995 (Sharpe, 1995). Although Kim (2017) suggests the name was first coined by Chinnery (2006).

Students are now migrating from computers to more portable handheld devices, Chaka (2009). Indeed, Martin and Ertzberger (2013) studied the difference between the use of computers and mobile phones/devices in a classroom setting and found that students now show more enthusiasm, they were more engaged, excited and motivated by the new technology compared to the computer based treatment that did not have access to the mobile device.

Mobiles Aiding Autonomy and Independent Learning

According to Hubbard (2009) over the last few years we have seen promising development in the area of learner training as well as with the more general movement in the teaching profession towards developing learner autonomy. Mobile technologies may serve as an amplifier or catalyst to push learners to pursue their personalised learning, Ma (2017).

MALL can be independent or collaborative as Tai (2012) proved with the integration of problem-solving tasks into the curriculum. Learners used their mobiles independently for an out-of-class task in which they use their GPS-enabled devices to collect and share Internet-based data and communicate in the L2 with each other and their teacher to obtain information and guidance. Back in class the material was peer reviewed and evaluated, discussed and solutions found in a truly collaborative problem-solving exercise that ensured the students authentic interaction and negotiation of meaning. Bannister and Wilden (2013) found that tablets and Apps in school will allow students to take some control over their learning. Mobile learning breaks temporal and spatial lines, placing educational resources at the service of the students (Andujar, 2015).

Active participation in language learning implies that learners take responsibility for their own learning with teachers ideally playing their part in facilitating this long-established philosophy of good English language teaching. Mobile technologies enable the implementation of this philosophy in ways that were previously impossible. Therefore, students now carry with them powerful devices with which they can: create and share multimodal texts, interact spontaneously with people anywhere in the world, use language outside the classroom, construct their own language production and learning needs, share info with others, provide evidence of progress gathered across a range of settings, and this is all in

a variety of media (Kukulska-Hulme et al, 2015). This means that the TOEFL students now have this ever-expanding database of materials generated from themselves and others from both inside and outside the classroom from which to draw on and use at any time. With guidance in the classroom reviewing and evaluating their own recordings and possibly others can have huge benefits as they begin to identify the strong and weak areas of their language production. By listening, noting and evaluating others in the group it can strengthen the community of learners as participants learn more about each other and the language we use.

So one of the biggest advantages of e-learning or MALL is that it enables learners to learn in non-classroom environment when they are not in class and whenever they have access to their phones or personal devices for example it gives the learners more opportunities as they can learn while on the bus or train. In other words, m-learning gives the learners the chance to learn whenever and wherever that suits them (Mosavi Miangah & Nezarat, 2012).

Exam preparation and Washback

Although the area of exam preparation is an enormous sector in the ESL industry the fact that the problems teachers face in selecting and using test preparation materials have been ignored for so long in TESOL. Little or no guidance is available to teachers on good conduct in test preparation teaching or on the selection of ethical and appropriate test preparation materials (Hamp-Lyons, 1998).

Furthermore, speaking appears to be the most difficult domain to improve through taking training courses (Liu, 2014). From Lui's investigation there appeared to emerge little or no relationship with TOEFL iBT scores and coaching for the reading and listening skills and almost no relationship with writing and speaking. This finding is consistent with previous studies on test preparation concerning the TOEFL (e.g., Bachman et al., 1995; Nguyen, 2007)

and other standardized tests (e.g., Powers & Rock, 1999). Mousavi (2014) also found that there was no significant change in the reading scores for the TOEFL in comparison with IELTS preparation and went on to suggest that it could be concluded that formal preparation doesn't provide our English students with necessary skills to improve in these high stake exams. However, more recent studies such as Kim (2018), found that using MALL activities with a small group of ten Korean students significantly reduced test anxiety and improved their listening skills to some degree. The vast majority of MALL studies have focused on vocabulary, therefore little has been published regarding speaking, even less for exam preparation and virtually none for South America, it is this gap in research in speaking practice for exams that I hope to contribute to the understanding of.

Washback is defined by Messick, (1996) as the extent to which the test influences language teachers and learners to do things that they would not necessarily otherwise do. For a long time, washback was seen as a negative influence such as Chapman and Snyder (2000) who saw it as an impediment to introducing new instructional practices. However, more recently washback has become a focus for both empirical and theoretical investigation. Alderson and Wall (1993) demonstrated how ill-defined a lot of the discussion of washback had been as they constructed 15 different versions of washback hypothesis. Others such as Cheng (2004) have investigated the impact of deliberate attempts to engineer change in language teaching and learning by modifying public examinations. The studies suggest that while it may be relatively easy to use tests to bring about change in the content of teaching, it is much more difficult to achieve changes in methodology. So, you might easily be able to change *what* they teach but not *how* they teach it. Andrew's (2002) case study from Hong Kong supports this idea as they found very positive washback over a period of three years on an oral presentation course with a set exam. However, they also noted that the sort of washback which is most apparent seems to represent a very superficial level of learning

outcome: familiarisation with the exam format, and the rote-learning of exam-specific strategies. Students are learning formulaic phrases and language features but they might not have the skills on when and how to use them.

Essentially, it comes down to the teacher, as Spratt (2005) notes the decisions a teacher needs to make concerning teaching towards exams involve choices about the best ways of teaching and promoting learning to achieve both good exam results and good learning of the content of the syllabus. Therefore, teachers face a set of pedagogic and ethical decisions about what and how best to teach and facilitate learning if they wish to make the most of teaching towards exams.

WhatsApp and Multimodality

Because WhatsApp is a multimodal form of communication which brings together multifunctional tools, Kukulska-Hulme et al. (2015) it provides its users with a range of modal affordances to exploit and with its ease of use and popularity around the world it has certainly become one of the most influential formats of communication. Building on the work of Ying Tang and Khe Foon Hew, (2017), who researched MIM in Education and completed a review of 39 different studies on the topic found with regard to improving student cognitive output, there was cautious optimism. They noted four main technological affordances; temporal, user-friendly, minimal cost, and multi-modality features. They also discovered six specific ways in which MIM was used in education: journaling, dialogic, transmissive, constructionist with peer feedback, helpline, and assessment. Furthermore, it was noted that

MIM appears to make the development of social presence easier than other forms of computer-mediated communication.

Bannister (2013) lists many ways in which tablets can be used in and out of the classroom. Although it is addressing tablets the activities could equally be done on today's smartphones as they offer identical technology just with a smaller screen. The inbuilt cameras can be used in a whole manner of ways, from asking students to produce visual dictionaries of lexical sets through to building presentations on a topic. Video recordings and associated app can transform the students into film makers where they can make dialogues, role plays and drama activities. Audio recordings can be utilised for information swap, split readings, describing a Word for others to guess, podcasts and more.

Burdon (2010) argues that the internet has allowed the 'decoupling' of groups by removing the time and spatial barriers whilst still enabling individuals to converse in groups. However as McLoughlin, (2007) warn not every piece of technology has a pedagogical value determined or dictated by its particular function. Burdon (2010) notes there are "other important elements required, including the imagination and creativity of the individual user who must conceptualize problems or issues in their own environment and context."

Testing Speaking

A new emerging area appears to be testing speaking via technology or Mobile Assisted Language Assessment (MALA). Tarighat (2016) study which was connected to the FCE speaking module used WhatsApp to record during each session a two minute voice message into a shared group. Although there were mixed responses they found that when listening to one's own or one's peers' speech, closer monitoring was observed and it was

stated that awareness towards structure was raised. It is suggested that MALA be used alongside other forms of assessment to form part of the learners' final score. Some of their feedback included:

“All of us could speak and we could listen to our classmates' speaking carefully and more than one time. We could speak without stress.”

“I'm not good at speaking and this method can really help. It rocks!”

Time is another important aspect contributing to MALA, in Tarighat (2016) investigation learners claimed that having sufficient time to think and produce language can lead to more satisfactory results. However, some thought of it as a con, claiming it would differ from real-life situations and would not be appropriate exercise in order to contribute to improvising. It could be that MALA is not only suitable for only a form of final assessment, but it can also be utilised as a method of teaching as it aids assessing during the course. Therefore, assessment and practice are taking place simultaneously in MALA, furthermore, these opportunities are created at the learners place of choice and pace of choice. It is this element of MALL and MALA that I believe could be very beneficial for students preparing for international exams as they build a sharable database of recordings they can reflect and model from.

A study that used WhatsApp solely outside of the classroom in order to improve verbal communication skills was undertaken by Minalla (2018) and they found that the participants who underwent the voice messages on WhatsApp treatment significantly outperformed those who underwent in *text* messages on WhatsApp. They noted that students enjoyed the freedom to express themselves without any interference from others; they had a sense of security and could participate at any time. Minalla, (2018) further mentions that it was also a chance for the teacher to use the students' records to check and evaluate their

language use. This non-obtrusive evaluation of speaking can facilitate a more interactive teaching and learning process.

The results showed that the communicative skills among the students could be improved if they were given suitable methods and platform to encourage them to practice their skills. Expanding on this Jafre, (2018) found ten themes emerging concerning students' perception towards enhancing communicative skills using Whatsapp. The themes were the following:

1. Interest and Motivation 2. Self-learning 3. Lecturers and peers collaborations 4. Time factor/ Time allotted 5. Learning at own pace 6. Effective learning 7. Communicative skills 8. Easy to access 9. Money and resources 10. Anxiety issue.

Methodology

For this project, which is investigating the use and benefits of WhatsApp for international exam speaking preparation and the activities that might help students during their speaking preparation process. In addition, it will be looking at the materials and task types preferred by the students as well as measuring student output and perceptions.

As qualitative research is a paradigm of inquiry that allows researchers to examine human behaviour in depth and the reasons that govern such behaviour, Ma, (2015) it is well suited to this enquiry. If exploring new topics or understanding complex issues, e.g. for explaining people's beliefs and behaviours or for identifying the social norms of a society, qualitative research is useful. Therefore, qualitative research is most applicable for addressing 'why' questions to understand and explain issues or 'how' questions that describe process or behavior (Hennink, Hutter, & Bailey, 2011). Participant observations and in-depth

interviewing are the two frequently adopted strategies to collect qualitative data and these are two practices that will be used in this study.

Case study

The case study employs data from diversified sources and aims to provide a detailed, enriched understanding of students' perspectives and practices regarding their personalised mobile learning experience from a socio-cultural perspective. According to Creswell (2017) it is a qualitative approach where a bounded system is explored through detailed and in-depth data collection involving multiple sources. Using this approach allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings. Stake (1995, p.237) defines it as *"both the process of learning about the case and the product of our learning"*. Yin (1999, p.1211) on the other hand states it as *"The all-encompassing feature of a case study is its intense focus on a single phenomenon within its real-life context...[Case studies are] research situations where the number of variables of interest far outstrips the number of datapoints"*.

Even though case studies have often been used to orientate or sensitise the researcher to variables that are manipulated or controlled in an experiment this is not their only use, as Nunan, (1992) argues this investigation of a single instance is a legitimate form of inquiry. Experimental case study research typically compares two or more groups however, single case study research involves a single group and does not involve an experimental or control group. The behaviour of the group is measured at two or more points in time.

There are six main advantages of using case studies according to Adelman (1976). They offer a 'strong reality', it is easy to extend and generalise from a case, it can offer different viewpoints, it is a bank of data that can be used in other research, the information can be acted on immediately and it can be more accessible than other scientific means of

study. According to Wei and Moyer (2009) longitudinal study collects data from a small number of participants a few times over a period of time and it has advantages such as the ability to track sequential developmental patterns and change, individual differences, multiple data sources and comprehensive data. However, they also found that it can involve participant attrition, additional costs, and vulnerability to miss data as there is a high demand on consistency.

A further advantage of case studies is that they can afford intensive study of a particular case or group, Wei and Moyer (2009). However, they also found some drawbacks to case study design, they can be susceptible to bias as often the researcher spends a lot of time with the participants and this can lead to practice bias. In the end, considering all the overall benefits of a case study such as the ease of undertaking the study, creation of a data bank and the realistic nature, makes it the most favourable method of study for the three groups being considered.

Four essential elements are required to ensure reliability and validity according to Yin (1984): Construct validity, internal validity, external validity and reliability. Despite having some issues regarding validity and reliability, Nunan (1992) concludes that case studies are well suited to small-scale linguistic investigations. As case studies can permit the use of multiple sources of data, both qualitative and quantitative, it is able to provide rich and in depth data on the behaviour of an individual or small group (Wei and Moyer, 2009).

Participants Table 1.

Groups taking part

Group	Size	Date
Group A	5	June 2019
Group B	8	July 2019
Group C	6	November 2019

Participants

The mixed gender groups used for this investigation are all from the University Del Norte and were involved with the project over a period of one semester. I worked with three groups (A, B and C); all three were identical **TOEFL preparation** classes, group **A** with 5 students took place in June 2019, group **B** with 8 students undertook their course in July 2019 and the final class was group **C**, with 6 students, was in November 2019. All the groups are from the universities' extension program, which draws students from outside the pre-graduate program, so they are very mixed socially, age wise, as well as professionally because they have very different study backgrounds. These are not undergraduate students but rather any other type of student that wants to improve their language skills. Therefore, they could be any age from 16 to 60. It is important to note that these three groups were all directly taught by me for a period of 30 hours, two hours a day, over approximately three weeks.

These groups were selected as they all had a direct and imminent need to practice speaking in preparation for an exam, TOEFL.

Analysis of WhatsApp content

With the three groups a specific WhatsApp group (called Exam Preparation) was set up and administered by myself. Students from the class were asked to volunteer and those willing to participate were added to the group. The participation sign up rate was very high with ninety five percent of students volunteering to be part of the project.

The preparation course is 30 hours long and is completed four times a week in 2 hour classes. During the classes some speaking activities were completed through WhatsApp (WA) with the students using their personal devices to record their responses back into the WA group. As WhatsApp is a cross platform messenger system it can be synchronous and

asynchronous. All data is recorded and stored automatically therefore making analysis of input and output relatively simple.

The activities undertaken were designed to simulate exactly the exam questions types they would be facing in the international exam. In the TOEFL speaking exam they have four tasks, 1 independent question and 3 integrated questions where they read and listen or just listen to information before answering a related question. There were six sections but in August 2019 this changed along with some other sections, shortening the exam overall by 30 mins. In the real exam all students are in a computer lab sitting near other candidates who are doing exactly the same exam, at the same time. This means that, even with headphones and microphone sets, there is still a lot of noise and possible distraction in the exam room.

For the integrated questions they read a short campus announcement first which could be an article in a campus newspaper, or a letter published in a campus newspaper. It will describe some change, usually 2, that are happening, or it will propose some changes. They have 45 seconds to read it, a countdown timer is displayed on the whiteboard to keep them to time. Next, they hear two students talking about what they read, usually one of the students will agree with the change, disagree with the change, or (rarely) have a mixed opinion. They give two reasons for their support or opposition and these reasons will address the reasons for the change mentioned in the reading. After hearing the conversation, they have 30 seconds to prepare your answer, and 60 seconds to speak which they do directly into their phones at the same time as the other students.

In the general to specific question they see a short reading about an academic term, process or idea. It is displayed on the whiteboard and topics usually relate to biology, psychology or business and they have 45 or 50 seconds to read it. Next, they hear a short lecture about the same term, process or idea which contains either one or two examples and

these might be from the personal life of the speaker. They are given 30 seconds to prepare your answer, and 60 seconds to speak. The readings were delivered via a class set of books or is displayed on the whiteboard, the listening was relayed through the class PA system and they only used their phones for their voice recordings.

Finally, question four is about an academic term or concept, they listen to a lecture that is about 1.5 to 2 minutes long. The lectures in this section are most often about biology, sociology, business, or history and are illustrated using two examples, or one example with two clear parts (before/after, cause/effect, etc). The lecture starts with a short introduction, then example(s) are given and when it finishes, they are asked a specific question about the lecture that mostly requires that you summarize the example(s). They are given 20 seconds to prepare, which is counted down on the whiteboard, and 60 seconds to speak, which is done directly into their people as before with the rest of the students.

So, for the TOEFL classes, I used questions and timings directly from official preparation materials and so the activities are as close to the real experience as possible. The students all recorded their independent speaking tasks into the group at the same time and the other 3 integrated task responses were also practiced and recorded in the same way. The conditions in the classroom replicated exam conditions with students sitting near each other, undertaking the same task, at the same time. They all prepared and recorded their answers at the same time with the pressure of a countdown clock displayed at the front of class. We used official TOEFL materials and questions and kept to the exact formats for authenticity.

WhatsApp was also used to send some other course information, useful documents, handouts or links were also transmitted using WhatsApp, any responses to these was also noted. Participation levels and extent were recorded for each student, thus providing a clear record on the amount of interaction and the content type of interaction.

Other Instruments to Collect Data

Structured interviews

Interviews are probably one of the most important sources of information in a case study (Yin, 2003). In structured interviews, each participant is asked the same questions using the same wording and in the same order as all the other participants (Corbetta, 2003). The strengths of a structured interview are that it is efficient with regards to time, it limits researcher subjectivity and bias, and the researcher controls the topics and format of the interview, making it easier to code, compare and analyse data (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010). There are many advantages such as, gaining further insight and context, build rapport, uncovering what is important to the students and being able to investigate the topic further face to face, gaining a more personal perspective (Doody, 2013).

Corbin (1990) categorized questions used for data into four types. The first being sensitizing questions that aid the researcher into understanding what the data may be indicating. The second are theoretical questions, which help the researcher to see the process and be able to make connections between concepts and understand their relationships. The third are questions of a more practical nature. These provide direction and help with the development of a theory. Finally, guiding questions do just that, in that they guide the interview, observations and analysis of data.

The interviews took place at the university with the third group, group C. It took place at the culmination of their course and once they had participated in the project. The interview used the survey questions as a base and the interlocutor asked the participant to expand on their answers and give details and explanations if possible. The session was recorded on a mobile device, see transcription in the appendix.

Questionnaires

Nunan (1992) notes that although the construction of a reliable and valid questionnaire is a specialized task it is very useful for collecting and handling data. According to Brown and Rodgers (2002), surveys and questionnaires can be used to understand how things are really operating in a learning setting, or to describe the abilities, performances, and other characteristics of the learners, teachers, and administrators involved in the process. Christensen, (2011) found that strengths outnumber the weaknesses with questionnaires being able to measure attitudes of participants well, it is quick and easy to administer, especially if it is online, exact information can be gained from closed questions and open ended items can provide detailed responses in the participants own words. In addition to these Robinson, (2018) notes that surveys are useful for collecting data across multiple sites or time, which can then be compared, this will be useful in this project as I am dealing with three groups, over an extended period of time.

Concerning the administration of the surveys, Sue and Ritter (2007) recommend the use of online methods especially when dealing with closed populations and when the target respondents have access to the necessary technology as they do in this study. The participants were a group of professionals, and they had access to computers and mobile devices with internet connection, accessible from either the university campus or outside the university, or both. Therefore, the online questionnaire method was adopted as it is easy to administer and evaluate. The questionnaire was sent to all the participants in the project via a link through WhatsApp.

The questionnaire (see Appendix, p.64) consists of 11 questions, 9 of which use a likert scale of 1 to 10. The lowest numbers either being in total agreement or not all useful

and the highest numbers in total disagreement or very useful. The two other questions are yes/no with an option to explain their answers in further detail.

Before any student participated in the project they were informed of the background and aims of the project and the confidentiality agreement. The terms and conditions were explained verbally as well as with a handout that had an explanation in Spanish. Those wishing to participate signed a consent form and then they were added to the group. Names have been substituted with *student 1*, *student 2* or *student 3* etc.

The Findings

I am investigating how WhatsApp activities help support TOEFL course students prepare for the speaking section of the exam and looking at the type of materials and activities that are used through WhatsApp to practice the speaking section. Additionally, student perceptions towards using WhatsApp were also scrutinized along with its contribution towards the learning community. Furthermore, I will note my perceptions as a TOEFL instructor regarding how I felt the WhatsApp treatment worked in the classroom, reflecting on and comparing to other previous preparation classes that did not use WhatsApp.

- Analyse WhatsApp activities help support TOEFL course students prepare for the speaking section.
- Describe the kinds activities students undertake when using WhatsApp

- Explore student's perception of the use of WhatsApp for exam preparation
- Describe how the TOEFL course contributes to a learning community

Analysis of WhatsApp interactions

Figure 2 below shows the interaction patterns for group A, the TOEFL voice responses contribute approximately 57% of the total input from the students. Unconnected images or texts such as greetings, checking when or where the class is or selfies and group photos had 43 contributions, which is 29% of input. The third significant proponent is images or documents sent that are directly connected to the course material, there were 12 instances which makes 8% of total inputs. There were 6 contributions of photos taken during the class of whiteboard information and only 2 recordings were deleted.

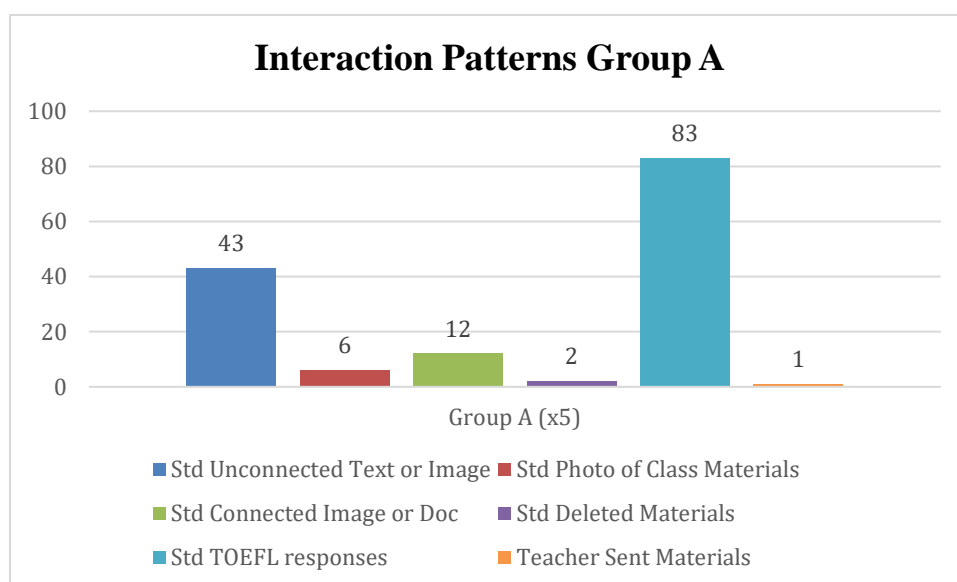


Figure 2. WhatsApp Interaction Patterns Group A

Group **B** is shown in figure 3. This group had a higher number of total interactions with 185 than group **A** which had 147. The TOEFL responses made up 64% of the total input. Students sending connected images or useful documents to the group was the second highest contributor with 25 instances followed by unconnected text or images with 23. The teachers contribution to the materials on the group had 22 occurrences which is a large increase from input to group **A**. The students deleted 12 items from the group.

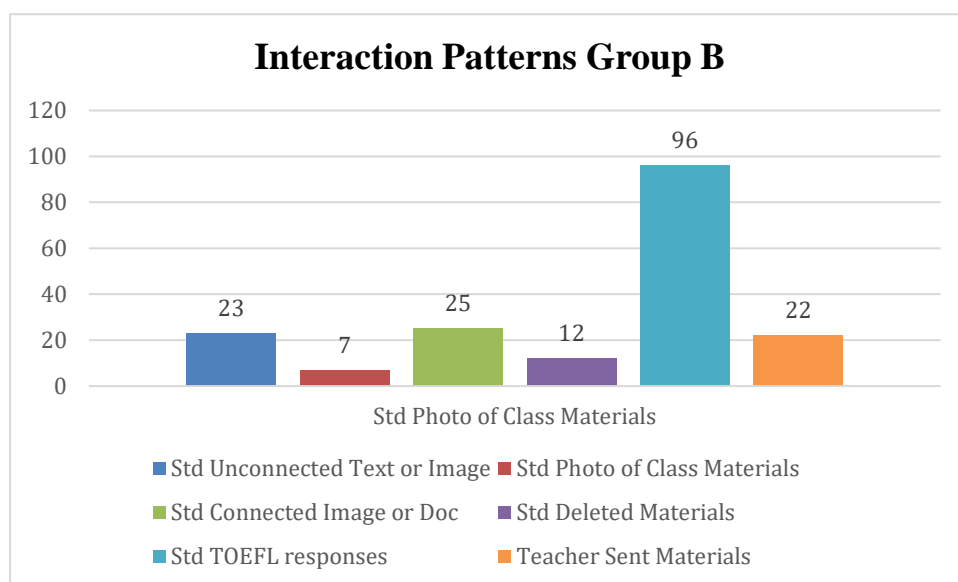


Figure 3. WhatsApp Interaction Patterns Group B

The final group, group **C**, shown in figure 4 had the smallest total number of interactions with 128. From the total student input, TOEFL voice responses comprised of 81%, with connected and unconnected images and text both contributing approximately 8% each. Teacher input was much higher than with previous groups with a percentage of 19 of the total interactions, this compared to 12% for group **B** and less than 1% for group **A**. The deleted items also had a very small frequency of only one occurrence and there were three instances of class material being uploaded, which is smaller than both the previous groups.

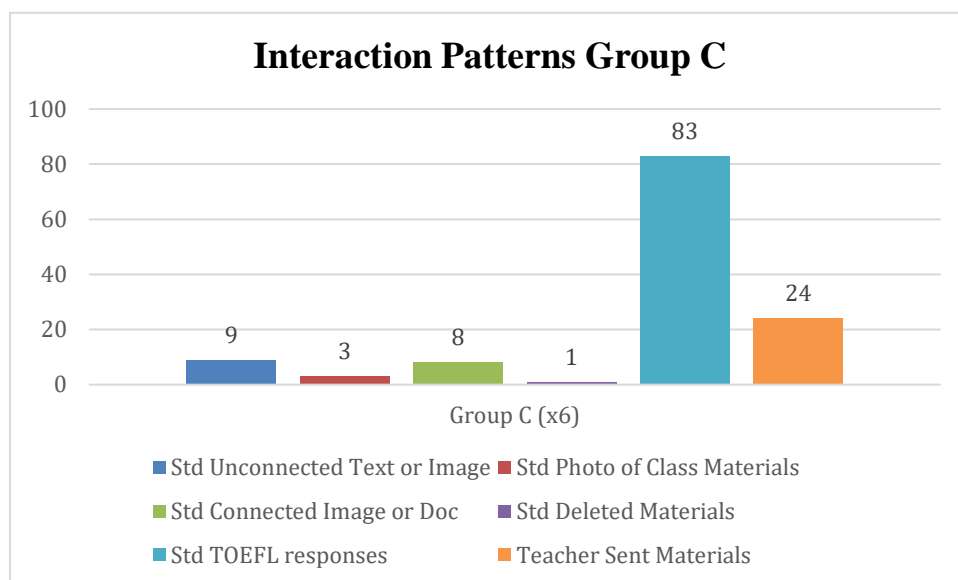


Figure 4. WhatsApp Interaction Patterns Group C

Findings of Survey

The survey was sent to students via a link through WhatsApp and we had 16 responses in total. Of the 16 sent, only one student did not use WhatsApp and they stated their reason was communicative apprehension, student 1 stated *“I’m ashamed that everyone listens”*. Other participants used the WhatsApp project because they believed it, student 2 *“is a good way to practice the formal and informal speaking and listening”*, student 3. *“is a good way to communicate, fast and easy access”* and student 4, *“It allows to review the material in an easier way”*. Other reasons were they wanted to practice and because of perceived obligation or they were doing the TOEFL course.

There were two open questions, question three; Why did you participate in the WhatsApp group? and question fourteen; Why or why not would you recommend WhatsApp to practice for an exam? The rest of the questions were on a likert scale of 1 to 10, questions four to eight being 1 as *totally agree* and 10 *totally disagree*. However, for questions nine to twelve, the scale was 1 *Not at all useful* and 10 being *Extremely useful*.

Question 4, (Is WhatsApp a quicker method of getting feedback in learning?) asked for opinions regarding feedback using WhatsApp. The majority agreed that it is a quicker method of getting feedback although 6 responders did disagree to some degree. There was also a positive response with regard to question 5 concerning the learning community (Can WhatsApp improve communication between participants?). The majority of students (62.5%) believed that WhatsApp can improve the learning community, see figure 5 below.

WhatsApp can improve communication between participants

16 responses

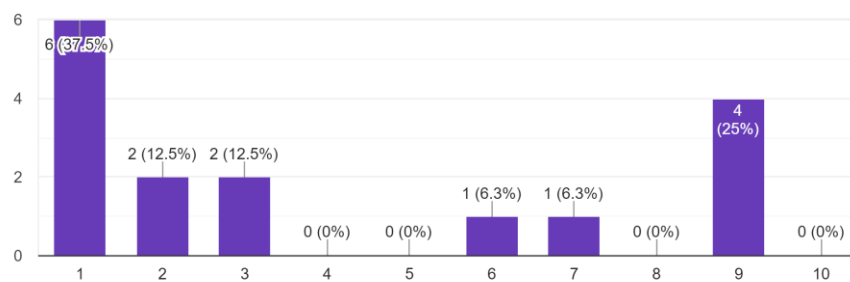


Figure 5. Can WhatsApp improve communication between participants?

This result is supported by question 12, see figure 6 below, which shows almost an unanimous belief that WhatsApp is a good medium for asking the group questions.

Asking questions to the group?

16 responses

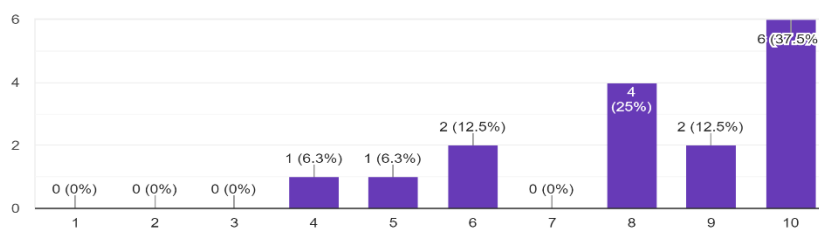


Figure 6. Is WhatsApp useful for asking questions to the group?

With regards to the idea of time and space boundaries being flexible when using WhatsApp idea most people agreed that it provided a more flexible system, see figure 7.

WhatsApp is flexible as it has no space/time boundaries

16 responses

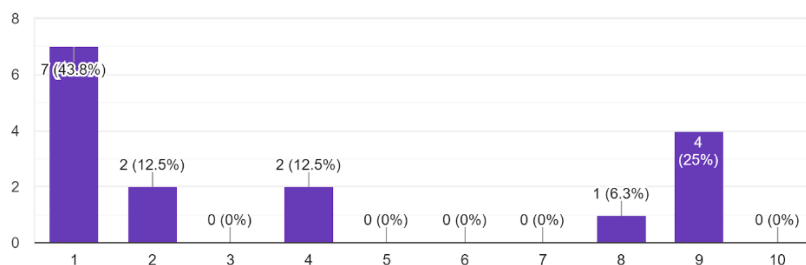


Figure 7. Is WhatsApp flexible regarding time/space boundaries?

Concerning the question of WhatsApp supplementing conventional teaching and

WhatsApp can supplement conventional teaching and face to face classroom learning

16 responses

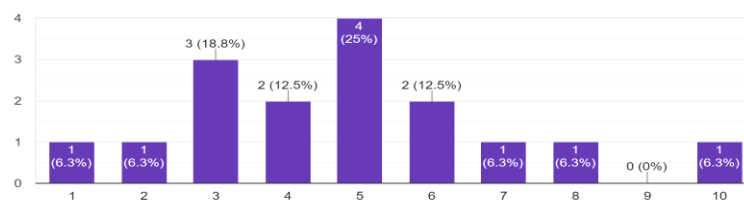


Figure 8. Can WhatsApp supplement conventional teaching and face to face learning?

face to face learning, see figure 8 above. The response was very mixed and rather ambivalent with a slight majority of students choosing to sit on the fence giving neither, a positive or negative response.

The results from question 9, see figure 9, concerning privacy show a strong concern regarding privacy with 64% of the students expressing unease with WhatsApp.

I am concerned about privacy issues in using WhatsApp

11 responses

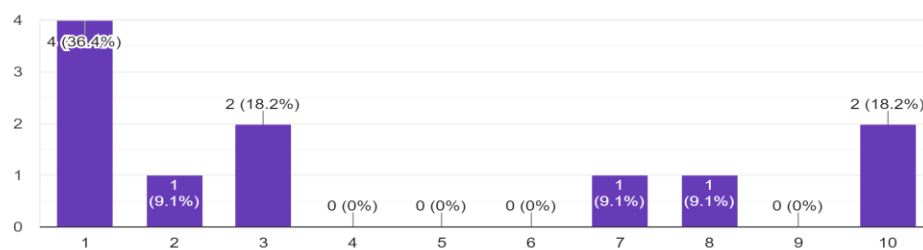


Figure 9. Are you concerned with Privacy on WhatsApp?

The most unanimously positive of all the results were with question ten, seen in figure 10, “How useful was WhatsApp for reviewing speaking parts?” A significant 93.7% of students believed it was useful for reviewing speaking with only one student responding it is not so useful. In addition, the vast majority of students also agreed that WhatsApp can be useful for sending other documents, and asking questions to the group.

Reviewing speaking parts?

16 responses

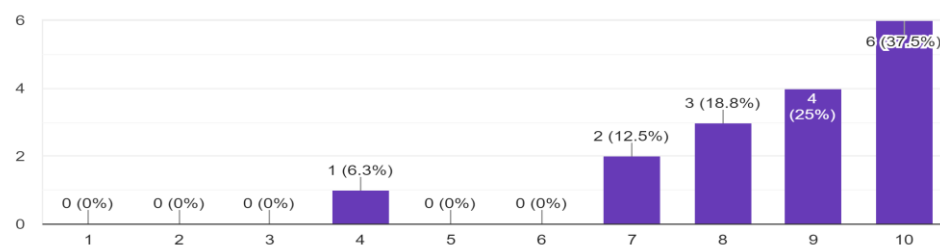


Figure 10. Is WhatsApp useful for Reviewing speaking?

The final two questions asked first if they would recommend using WhatsApp and then invited them to expand on their reasons for recommending it or not. The results were, on the whole, very positive, below is a summary of their comments.

(student 1) “It is faster and has faster feedback”

(student 2) *“Yes, because we can share and request information fast, every moment and wherever”*

(student 3) *“Because it was a good form [way] to review my mistakes and listen the corrections to the other integrants [students].*

(student 4) *“Because it can improve your methods of study, also, you save lots of data on the group and then go back to check it out, also, while recording the speaking tasks and listening [to] your own activity, helps you out to do better.”*

(student 5) *“It is helpful while reviewing speakings.”*

(student 6) *“I do recommend the method is easy and quick to feedback your mistake.”*

(student 7) *“Yes, I recommend use WhatsApp because for TOEFL we have few classes to practice speaking.”*

Findings of the Structured Interviews

Interviews took place with four students from Group C towards the end of the course, once we had completed all the WhatsApp activities and so students could reflect on the work done. The questions investigated student the extent of WhatsApp use, the different contexts of its use, the various learning communities that students consulted with and the academic benefits of it. Students were also interviewed on their feelings of psychological empowerment and how their academic participation was affected by WhatsApp usage. The recorded interview (see Appendix for a transcript) was semi-structured, using the questionnaire as the base from which to explore the various topics.

Receiving Feedback and other Perceptions

One of the main issues to come out of the interviews was the students noted that getting feedback was much easier and could be given via a teacher voice message in WhatsApp. Student one commented *“I think the main benefit of making the recording is that it allows for feedback you know I do have the recordings and you can listen to others and take ideas”*. Reviewing your own speaking and others was also mentioned as a key benefit to using the group. Student two noted *“I don't like to listen to me, but, but I insist to me but then you hear your voice and you see that you are making progress or you know these mistakes”*. The interviews also revealed that they enjoy listening to other recordings from the group as it gives them some ideas and they can also identify mistakes they and others make.

They mentioned that by using the checklist provided to them (see appendix) they were able to self-evaluate a lot better and identify their weak areas. Most notable were hesitate or long winded introductions, poor cohesive markers, repetition of ideas or lexis, omitting parts of the question and fluency.

With regards to autonomous learning, the students supported the idea that this tool (WhatsApp) should be used in conjunction with classroom practices and they expressed some scepticism concerning using WhatsApp alone without teacher support to learn or practice for an exam.

Other key issues that were raised were privacy and anxiety. A number of students expressed initial unease about voice recording into a group of unknown students. However, it was also noted that the topics were very general and not of a really personal nature. In addition, the interviews revealed concerns regarding global security and as WhatsApp is owned by Facebook it cannot be trusted, because they have a very poor record of security and privacy.

Finally, the students stated they liked the WhatsApp group as it gave them ‘a window’ into the classroom. They could follow some of the class topics and activities by looking at WhatsApp even if they were not actually in class. They mentioned they could review what materials and exercises were done so they did not feel left out.

As an instructor I felt one of the main benefits of using WhatsApp was the fact that all input is timed and stored. This enables replay, self-evaluation, evaluation from peers and teachers. This repetition of recordings supports students (and teaches) enormously by affording the time to help identify weaknesses, which could be in timings, structure, vocabulary, pronunciation, coherence, vocabulary choice, grammar structures, etc.

Additionally, from the point of view of exam preparation for a computer based speaking test using WhatsApp in the class simulates very closely the impersonal nature as well as the technologically and distractive environment of examinees all talking at once in a time critical situation. Previously, without WhatsApp, undertaking speaking activities was far more difficult and time consuming to listen and evaluate all the students as well. Before students could do peer evaluation however, without a precise record of what was said, having total recall is almost impossible which can lead to misinterpretation, doubt and confusion.

Using WhatsApp to give feedback also has major benefits, as it is quicker to give recorded notes in an audio message than type all the corrections and notes out. The students also have a further listening activity and can easily refer back to their recording to confirm the errors and points made from the evaluation.

Discussion

A striking element that is evident when looking at the interaction patterns of the WhatsApp groups are the proportions of student input and teacher input. Across the three groups the vast majority, 90% is student produced with teacher input being only 10% in total. This implies that by the teacher leading and guiding the activities the amount of teacher talk time is heavily reduced leading to a more autonomous practice style. This is supported by Rambe & Bere (2012) who stated MALL supports more flexible personalised learning.

I believe it is important to guide the speaking sessions in the classroom as leaving the students to complete the activities outside leads to less overall production. This is at odds with the idea of WhatsApp breaking the barriers of time and space however, the teacher plays an important role in facilitating and coaching the learners towards achieving the learning outcomes. Therefore, although many suggest there appears to be a trend of learners moving towards autonomous learning, they as Ramamurthy (2015) notes, still rely on the teachers to achieve learning goals despite the available resources and opportunities at their fingertips. As some confirmation of this, the survey discovered that the students were very hesitant to commit to the idea that WhatsApp substituting classroom and face to face learning with 50% choosing a neutral position on this idea, and the rest being equally split between positive and negative.

There was an interesting increase in the amount of teacher sent materials over the period, it increased from only one contribution in the first group to 22 and 24 for groups **B** and **C**. This increase occurred due to the familiarisation on the part of the teacher using WhatsApp. It became evident that material previously sent via the university student platform Blackboard could be sent more easily through whatsapp. Furthermore, the students, who are not full timers at the university, were not very adept in using this unfamiliar system compared

to WhatsApp therefore, it seemed more logical to use this as the main means of sending communications and information.

The proportions of unconnected materials being sent via WhatsApp was not of concern as I believe this sort of communication increases the bonding of students and creates a learning community, which in turn, should reduce anxiety of speaking. Zhang (2015) found that in order for good active learner participation the community environment is essential and whether they feel safe to participate is a defining factor for their participation.

Working with groups of students that come from different backgrounds and social groups that have been bundled together can create classes that initially have very little in common and little social interaction. If they are only connected through WhatsApp it can create issues of privacy and confidentiality. Asking the students to contribute a personal 30 sec voice recording into a group of unknown peers is quite possibly a very daunting task and one that many might find intimidating. As Hansen, (2005) stated, creating a comfortable environment for students to establish peer trust' is very important. The survey supports this idea that WhatsApp can help foster a better learning environment as 62% of those questioned thought it improved communication between participants.

As I had a good amount of classroom interaction with these groups, work could be done on reducing anxiety, formative factors could be employed before, during or after testing. Implementing formative factors can assist in preparing students and so they are comfortable when testing occurs, Supon (2004). Fortunately, the groups used were small in size with the biggest being 8 students as using large groups questions the viability of using voice messages as providing feedback to all messages is very time consuming and challenging. This idea is supported by Hsu (2008) who noted that the students claimed that providing individual feedback to a group of 20 students was a great burden on the instructor and therefore, a

smaller class size would strengthen the audioblog activity, she suggests no more than 10 students per group.

Anyone who has been involved with examination preparation knows that overcoming or redirecting tension and nerves is an important element of success. Issitt, (2007). Han, (2005) identifies three main areas of anxiety in oral English tests such elements as communicative apprehension (i.e the fear of communicating with others), test anxiety (i.e. general fear of negative evaluation) and face anxiety (i.e. the fear of the direct threat to one's self-esteem due to the failure in talking with the examiner in oral test).

This last fear is also connected with privacy; the issue of privacy was evidently a concern of students, one of which did not participant due to this. In the survey a significant number of people expressed privacy issues (64%) and the topic was also mentioned in the interviews with students. As well as the privacy issue of other students listening to their recordings they also raised the issue that because WhatsApp is a multinational company owned by Facebook it could not be trusted completely, information and key words could be data mined and sold to other parties.

Shi, (2012) found three main subjective reasons for anxiety when using computer based tests. Firstly, students are generally inexperienced in taking computer-based tests, especially speaking tests. Secondly, time management is critical and influences how they perform. Thirdly, poor self-efficacy influences students' confidence in managing the oral test. These issues we tried to address in the project, even though it is strange and unnatural to talk with a computer we hoped that by practicing this extensively on the mobiles it would decrease their apprehension of talking to a machine. Their failure to manage time reflects their lack of metacognitive strategy and so by practicing using very visible and audible timers we reduced the errors regarding overly short answers or over running on answers.

Simulating the speaking test as much as possible in the classroom is, I believe, the key. Similarly, Airasian, (2001) homes in on the idea that teachers need to focus instruction only on the formats used on the test, use identical test items during instruction, and give pupils practice taking actual test items, all of which I believe these tasks replicate. However, he also states that these objectives, instruction and assessment should be woven together which was possible in this case.

Even though the format was rather rigid, as it followed the TOEFL design exactly, personalisation was possible. While using WhatsApp, students have the chance to individualize their learning, especially the language they have been working on. For example, they can monitor and check their language output for mistakes. Further, students are able to practice their pronunciation (accent, intonation, speed of speech) while rehearsing for the recording, all while exposing themselves more to the language and building positive feelings towards speaking, **Han** (2016). With the facility to easily repeat listen to the recording students felt it created excellent opportunities for them to find their mistakes and areas of weakness as well as strengths.

By using the learning community to help in evaluating others in the group via WhatsApp it helps build a more supportive environment. Having this sense of community building through online and face-to-face peer support is essential for learners and so when there are problems there is a fellow learner and/or teacher behind them to support them (Reinders, 2015). However, as Cheng (2013) noted it is necessary to further explore how to create a more supportive mobile learning environment for students who are less active and therefore less willing to express themselves in English.

Conclusion

We have seen that using WhatsApp with students in exam preparation classes can help support students in a variety of ways, the benefits of student (and teacher) voice recordings opens up a vast new area in comparison with traditional methods. And with the use of smartphones and devices for learning becoming a mainstream expectation over the next three to five years, Bannister (2013) I expect that the use of MALL will increase in second language learning. Therefore, more targeted, thoughtful pedagogic research and response in this area is becoming more and more important, involving new conceptualizations of what is to be learnt and new activity designs, Kukulska-Hulme (2017). We have seen that by using various WhatsApp activities in and out the classroom that simulate the TOEFL exam it is possible to provide more support for student learning.

International exams are equally becoming more and more important as our globalised world develops and interacts. As I have set out to discover how WhatsApp activities can help support students for international speaking exams I believe we have seen the benefits of MALL outweigh traditional teaching methods enough to warrant further scientific investigation. The activities undertaken have provided vital records of work and audio input from students that can be replayed and evaluated when necessary thus providing a more time and space flexibility of learning.

By practicing for the CBT using technology I believe the WhatsApp simulation supports students in their preparation in a number of different ways. In practising similar exam questions the students noted that with the same timings and exam conditions (as far as possible) made the activity beneficial. Students stated they had time to overcome anxiety of speaking to a machine, timing problems and anxiety of having others listen to their

recordings. They noted how they strengthened their self-evaluation abilities and spotted more errors in grammar, fluency, pronunciation or cohesion enabled by the facility for repeated listenings. The virtual space occupied by WhatsApp could also be interpreted, as Keogh (2017) noted it as a virtual ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development) in which learners were scaffolded by their teacher as well as their classmates,

The strengthening of the learning community through student to student interactions was evident in the quantity and content of the unconnected messages and data sent including sending class selfies, memes and comments to each other. The feedback from interviews indicated that although they have some privacy concerns, it enables a safe space for students to practice, a platform that is dynamic enough to facilitate the strengthening of their learning community. Technology has served as the vehicle in this study thus, adopting the right activities which complement the technology to have it suit the learning needs and contexts is vitally important. Having a small class that is guided, supported and motivated students with diverse pedagogies are important elements that should lead to success, Hsu (2008).

A huge challenge is that the computer based speaking test is seen as a very unnatural exercise as Nakatani, (2006) discusses the fact that usually the speaking skills involve four constraints: 1) it is a negotiated activity with two or more interlocutors 2) speaking is dynamic and real life conversations are not structured and do not follow a pre-fixed order or pattern 3) speaking usually requires the election of the interlocutor 4) Most conversations require common cultural and situational grounds and most times previous mutual knowledge. So, one of the many challenges is to overcome these restraints in CBT, as none of these conditions are met in a CBT testing environment, however MALL and WhatsApp can assist in the familiarisation with the technological conditions, exam format and expectations.

I hope that by looking at the type of materials and activities that are used in computer based oral testing and adapting them through WhatsApp to practice the speaking section for an international exam we can improve on future teaching in this area. By mimicking the test format and focusing on exact simulation of exam day conditions students received more valuable, constructive practice. I strongly believe that speaking and its sub skills are improved through using this application. This is supported by Al Bajalani, (2018) where they found smartphones improved EFL Kurdish university students' speaking sub-skills such as fluency, accuracy, communication strategies, speech acts and discourse markers.

As Heffernan, (2006) confirms, directly practicing the type of questions that appear in the exam, which are all arranged around the student-university paradigm, is very beneficial. This roleplaying the types of questions that appear in the speaking section of the TOEFL iBT gives teachers the opportunity to present their students with these types of situations in class.

By simulating the testing environment with the mobiles the students are able to become accustomed to the issues of speaking to a machine in a noisy, pressure filled environment. There is a lot of anxiety build up around a CBT, Laborda (2017) and Shi (2012) recommends improving the testing environment and as a result, students will familiarize with the new form of communication and build up confidence and reduce their anxiety as well. By focusing on listening-speaking skills it might increase the test-takers' chances of getting a higher score on the overall speaking component of the new TOEFL-iBT, Zareva, (2005).

I believe we still have a long way to go with using MALL in the classroom especially as Stricker, (2010) discovered that 44.5% of people in Colombia did not believe that the TOEFL gave them a good opportunity to demonstrate their ability to speak English. However, I think using MALL and WhatsApp has a place in changing these perceptions as they are able to practice and familiarize more with the exam they are going to take and thus

produce more accurate, less stressed and better organised and creative speaking responses. As Han, (2016) discovered the MALL experience fostered their creativity in constructing new sentences in speech.

Students found that the WhatsApp group provided more flexibility, personalised learning Rambe & Bere, (2012), and that it bridged formal and informal learning Cook, Pachler & Bradley, (2008). Although there are privacy issues, WhatsApp undoubtedly aids interaction between students and the teacher and students. It can enable the shy to participate, or support the participation of muted voices, Ng'ambi (2011). The built-in storage of messages allows students and teachers to revisit previous recordings for comparison and so student progression can be highlighted easily.

The biggest limitations of this case study were possibly time restraints and the number of participants. It would be beneficial to have a larger group over a longer period of time to produce more accurate findings and data. This was a teacher led collaboration and as of yet there are very few investigations on how to use MALL for more learner - learner activities. Since mobile technology is available to support real time voice discussions, developing learning activities to take advantage of this cost-effectively must surely be worth consideration, Kukulska-Hulme (2008). Improving autonomous learning via mobile is an area that looks to be under researched considering the advances made recently in technology.

Recommendations

I also feel that further studies could be made in MALL and the use of WhatsApp since technology development constantly brings new applications and methods into language teaching and learning. In this study, classroom instruction and support was provided to all groups, further studies could determine the effect of MALL in a more autonomous

environment. Additional recommendation for further study is to focus on MALL qualitative studies regarding the effect of WhatsApp on speaking and listening performance.

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Appendixes List

Student Survey	page
Student Consent Form	page
Student Self-Evaluation Checklist	page
Focus Group Transcript	page

28/11/2019


Exam Preparation using WhatsApp

Exam Preparation using WhatsApp

Student Feedback Survey

1. Email address *

TOEFL



IELTS™

English for International Opportunity


2. I participated in the whatsapp group
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

3. Why?

Agree or Disagree.....?

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28/11/2019

Exam Preparation using WhatsApp

4. WhatsApp is a quicker method of getting feedback in learning*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Totally agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally disagree

5. WhatsApp can improve communication between participants*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Totally agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally disagree

6. WhatsApp is flexible as it has no space/time boundaries*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Totally agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally disagree

7. WhatsApp keeps records of all multimedia content and can help learners to easily review them*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Totally agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally disagree

8. WhatsApp can supplement conventional teaching and face to face classroom learning*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Totally agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally disagree

9. I am concerned about privacy issues in using whatsapp*Mark only one oval.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Totally agree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Totally disagree

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28/11/2019 Exam Preparation using WhatsApp

10. reviewing speaking parts?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	extremely useful

11. receiving other documents related to exams?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely useful

12. asking questions to the group?
Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all useful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely useful

13. Would you recommend using WhatsApp to practice for an exam?
Mark only one oval.

☐ Yes

☐ No

14. Why or why not? (Puedes escribir en ingles o español)

☐ Send me a copy of my responses.

Powered by Google Forms

Universidad del Norte

Título del Proyecto: Maestría en Inglés como Segundo Idioma

Queridos estudiantes,

Estoy realizando un estudio sobre el uso de la aplicación WhatsApp en el aula y fuera del aula para las clases de preparación de exámenes de los participantes en la Universidad del Norte. Su objetivo es analizar las interacciones que ocurren dentro y fuera del aula entre los estudiantes de la clase y / o con el profesor.

Los datos de la investigación serán recopilados por mi persona, Andrew Miller y se utilizarán solo en el contexto del proyecto estipulado anteriormente.

Almacenamiento de datos para proteger la confidencialidad.

Su identidad y cualquier otra información que pueda identificarlo no se divulgará sin su consentimiento. La información es completamente confidencial. Periodo de tiempo:

La investigación se llevará a cabo desde septiembre de 2019 hasta octubre de 2019.

Consentimiento informado:

- He leído y comentado el documento titulado Descripción del Proyecto con los investigadores principales.
- Mi participación en el estudio es voluntaria.
- Los investigadores principales pueden retirarme del estudio de acuerdo a su discreción profesional.

- Si durante el curso del estudio se da información nueva que se pueda relacionar con mi disposición para continuar mi participación, los investigadores principales me la harán saber.
 - Cualquier información que se derive del estudio que me identifique personalmente no podrá ser divulgada sin mi consentimiento explícito.
 - Con mi firma expreso mi decisión de participar en el proyecto.
 -
 - Nombre del Estudiante:.....
 - Firma del Estudiante:
 - No de identificación:
 - No de teléfono:
-

Task	Ex.#1	Ex.#2	Ex.#3	Ex.#4	Ex.#5	Ex.#6
Pronunciation						
Did I speak loud and clear so that you can easily hear and understand me?						
Errors did not affect understanding						
Only a few pronunciation errors						
Varied intonation or flat sounding?						
Range and accuracy						
Did I use appropriate vocabulary and grammar?						
Most sentences are mistake free						
Did I use of complex sentence structures						
Did I use idiomatic language?						
Fluency and coherence						
Did I speak without too many long pauses or without speaking too slowly?						

Did I repeat myself?						
Topics developed logically?						
Did I include linking words and discourse markers (firstly, secondly, however, therefore, etc)						
Did I paraphrase when necessary?						
Structure overall						
Did my answers have a clear beginning, middle and end?						
Did I speak for the full time? (30sec/45sec/2mins)	30sec	45sec	45sec	45sec	45sec	2mins
Did I begin speaking straight after the time started?						
Did I answer each question appropriately?						

How can I improve?

Task #1

Task #2

Task #3

Task #4

Task #5

Task #6

Interlocutor (Andrew Miller) with four students. (edited and corrected) Recorded on the 28th November 2019 at Uninorte.

Interlocutor: Did you enjoy using Whatsapp in class?

Student 1: I am agnostic about it, I think it is not fun exactly but it's just practical.

Student 2: It's easier because everybody has it and it doesn't require any extra downloads or any equipment because it is something I use and something that everyone has already.

Student 3: In the beginning I found it very peculiar to use because I'm not used to giving a response to a group like that, I didn't know who was there, so, perhaps in the beginning I found it a little weird because I did not know who was in that group, who else was in the group so it was a little awkward, a little weird.

Student 4: What I did like is that the activity that you do, you are recording, your friends are also recording into the recording the responses so I found it interesting the fact that it's the same thing that you have to do in the exam with your headphones it's the same situation you can hear other people mumbling or speaking their responses. I like that idea that you can record on then you can listen to what other people are recording.

Interlocutor: Did you find it difficult in the beginning recording your voices into a group of people you didn't know well, people that were new to you?

Student 2: I don't know maybe but the topics are similar and familiar, mmm, so maybe if you are shy or you know the topic is very common and general so it's nothing too personal.

Student 4: Maybe I think a second point is that you have to stop worrying about it, other opinions. It's a good way to stop worrying about what other people think, another opinions

because this will happen in the test. It's going to be graded by three people maybe so it's ok, its part of the process.

Student 1: At first maybe it's uncomfortable but you realize it's normal

Student 2: I don't like to listen to me, but, but I insist to me but then you hear your voice and you see that you are making progress or you know these mistakes.

Interlocutor: Do you think it's easy, was it easy to self- evaluate or do you think *only* the teacher should do it or should it be a mix?

Student 4: I think it should be a mixture of both, because, hmmm, for example if I'm going to evaluate that maybe I'll listen to it and say oh yeah it's smooth but then maybe another person will find something different and maybe for example, I wouldn't have noticed you know saying "I think" all the time.

Student 2: Maybe in the next level, in the next course, you can use a voice message to give feedback.

Interlocutor: So you think I should do feedback using WhatsApp voice messages, I like it that's a good idea. I didn't do that.

Student 1: I think it is easier and faster than taking notes of each one, you could just record something.

Student 3: If I get feedback it is good because then you can go back to your voice recording and listen again and check again where. When you give feedback in class you can't do that.

Interlocutor: So, if I'm giving feedback do you think giving feedback is better into the open group or is it better giving it personally, privately?

Student 3: I think if you give feedback in the classroom or you know in the open, then maybe you know, your partner has the same mistake, has the same errors as you and you let them know too so it's maybe it is more efficient.

Interlocutor: How do you think the activities completed in WhatsApp have helped you prepare for the speaking exam?

Student 2: I think the timing is something, it is the best that you are always, you are speaking for 45 seconds and then you're practicing that time you give and yeah and so you'll paragraph in speech is now just 45 seconds so I think we, you know, are concerned about that timing and it helps

Student 1: I think the main benefit of making the recording is that it allows for feedback you know I do have the recordings and you can listen to others and take ideas.

Interlocutor: What didn't you enjoy about using Whatsapp?

Student 3: We already talked about that...The privacy thing in the beginning, listening to your own voice and sometimes difficult.

Interlocutor: Do you think using Whatsapp creates a better learning community?

Student 2: Yes, I think maybe, because you know you have the details of each one and I know you know for other activities you can contact them.

Student 4: Another example is when, you know, you don't come to class you can catch up, you see what is going on what you are working on so, maybe, if you come to class it is still possible to send your activities and you can participate.

Interlocutor: Do you see WhatsApp being used usefully to practice English in the future?

Student 2: As a teacher I would do, I am going to use it on one of my courses I think it's good, it's nice.

Interlocutor: So if you know someone who is studying for an international exam would you recommend using Whatsapp?

Student 1: Yes, I think in the manner that we have used it, yeah maybe yes.

Student 2: It's good you know getting used to people talking because if I ain't trying to and a practice you know maybe in Starbucks or something then the people around speaking in Spanish so maybe it's easier to concentrate.

Student 4: One issue is I think Facebook is connected to WhatsApp I believe, so you know there is a concern of privacy of that.